

CI. *Observations on the Abbé Mazeas's Letter on the Count de Caylus's Method of imitating the antient Painting in burnt Wax : By James Parsons, M. D. F. R. S.*

Read July 1, 1756. **T**HE subject of the Abbé Mazeas's letter, concerning what he thinks the encaustic painting in burnt wax, is very difficult to understand ; for although the count de Caylus has made an essay to find out the method of the antients in that kind of painting, his success, in the head of Minerva, mentioned in the Abbé's letter, does not seem to explain Pliny's meaning. This author is so very short and obscure in most things, that a bare literal translation of some parts of his work would hardly be reconcileable to sense ; and this is no where more evident than in this very subject.

I confess I do not pretend to understand what he means by painting in burnt wax, though I have considered it over and over, since my having translated the above letter. However, it may not be unenterprising to the Society, to hear a few passages of Pliny taken notice of upon the matter, by which, perhaps, some of the worthy members of this learned body may enter farther into it.

The two principal methods tried at Paris were these ; the Count's was waxing over the cloth or board, mixing up the colours with water, and rubbing the waxed ground over with Spanish chalk, in order to make the colours adhere to the waxed ground. The other was by mixing other ingredients with the wax

4 O 2

and

and colours and laying it on. In both these methods the picture is moved to the fire gradually, in order to liquify the wax, and blend and unite the colours, and then moved from it by as slow degrees. This cannot be called burning in wax, nor be counted encaustic painting; unless *uro*, or the Greek *καίω*, could signify to liquify as well as to burn, in which sense I never met them any where. And if these words mean only to burn, then encaustic painting can signify no more nor less than painting in enamel; in which wax, from its very nature, can have no share. And yet at the end of the 11th chapter of his 35th book, he seems to give *uro* another meaning: he is admiring the wonderful effects produced in dying stuffs, which being first scowered, are laid over with some colourless material, in whatever pattern they choose; and upon being dipped in a caldron of boiling liquor, the stuffs appeared to be finely and variously painted; “*Cortina pingit dum coquit; et adustæ vestes firmiores sunt, quam si non urerentur.*” Here *uro* must signify to boil; for we cannot say the burnt stuffs were become stronger, than if they had not been burnt.

In the same book he has these words:

“*Encausto pingendi duo fuisse antiquitus genera constat, cera et in ebore, cestro id est viriculo; donec classes pingi cœpere. Hoc tertium accessit, resolutis igni ceris penicillo utendi: quæ pictura navibus nec sole, nec sale ventisque corrumpitur.*”—

The close translation of this seems to be as follows:

“It appears, that anciently there were two kinds of encaustic painting, in wax, and in ivory, with a  
“*stilus;*

“ stilus ; until ships began to be painted : then this  
 “ third kind came up of using a brush or pencil, with  
 “ wax melted by fire, &c.” Now tho’ Pliny uses the  
 word *pingendi* in the two first, we cannot understand  
 that he could mean the laying on of paint, since the  
 instrument (the *cestrum*) being pointed, is incapable of  
 such an office ; and secondly, because he immediately  
 mentions a third kind of painting distinct from, and  
 an absolute contrast to the other two, wherein the  
 paint with the melted wax was laid on with a brush ;  
 and this contrast is very strong in another passage in  
 the same chapter, where he speaks of a famous vir-  
 gin called Lala, of whom he says, “ Romæ et peni-  
 “ cillo pinxit, et cestro in ebore, imagines mulierum  
 “ maxime.” That is she painted at Rome with a  
 pencil, and with the *cestrum* or stilus upon ivory,  
 chiefly the images or portraits of women.

We cannot help thinking, that what was done with  
 the *cestrum*, either upon the wax or ivory, was mo-  
 delling or carving ; for the modellers of this day, in  
 their compositions of wax and other materials, use  
 pointed tools to repair and render their figures sharp ;  
 and the workers in ivory use such tools of various  
 points and edges for the same purpose.

It will not be amiss in this place to take notice of  
 the sense, in which Mons. Durand puts this passage, of  
 which he makes a very loose translation in his history  
 of antient painting : viz. “ Il faut que j’indique ici  
 “ en peu des mots ce que c’est que cette peinture  
 “ en cire, que l’on perfectionne avec le feu : pour  
 “ cela il faut sçavoir, qu’ anciennement il y en avoit  
 “ de deux sortes ; dans la premiere, on employoit la  
 “ cire preparée en divers couleurs, qu’on appliquot  
 “ en

“ ensuite sur le bois, suivant l’esquisse qu’on y avoit  
 “ tracée, ou creusée avec un fer chaud ; dans la se-  
 “ conde on gravoit de meme dans l’yvoire, avec un fer  
 “ aigu et ardent les contours et generalement l’idée de  
 “ tout de sujet, apres quoi on appliquoit les couleurs  
 “ pour les Ombres, en laissant l’yvoire pour les jours,  
 “ et perfectionnant le tout ensemble par le moyen  
 “ du feu, comme on le pratiquoit aussi pour le  
 “ bois.”

Now it is very easy to see, that Pliny’s words are  
 very different from any thing in this translation ; and  
 that this may be more plain, I here give a close  
 translation of Mr. Durand’s words : viz. “ I must  
 “ shew here what this painting in wax is, which was  
 “ finished by fire. It must therefore be remarked,  
 “ that in antient times there were of two kinds of  
 “ this painting ; in the first they used wax pre-  
 “ pared in divers colours, which they then put  
 “ upon the wood, according to the design they had  
 “ traced out with a hot iron. In the second, they  
 “ engraved in the same manner upon the ivory, with  
 “ a sharp burning iron, the contour, and generally  
 “ the idea of the whole subject, after which they ap-  
 “ plied the colours for the shades, leaving the ivory  
 “ for the lights, and finishing the whole by the  
 “ means of fire, as they also practised it upon  
 “ wood.”

Monf. Durand has gathered these notions from *Pere  
 Hard.* and *Boulinger de pictura veterum* ; which are no  
 more applicable to Pliny, than they are practicable in  
 themselves ; Pliny has no such meaning, for his  
 words are very clear, as I have shewn it before : but  
 he takes the same liberty in that passage of the fe-  
 male

male painter, Lala, juſt mentioned, upon whom the words of Pliny are very precise; “ Romæ et penici lo  
 “ pinxit, et ceſtro in ebore :” which Monſ. Durand has rendered thus : “ elle peignot a Rome, ou ſur le bois,  
 “ ou ſur l’yvoire, comme on vouloit, ou avec le pin-  
 “ ceau, ou avec de cire colorée.” “ She painted  
 “ at Rome either upon wood or upon ivory, as ſhe  
 “ thought proper, either with a pencil, or with co-  
 “ loured wax.” Now Pliny has not one word of wood or coloured wax in this paſſage; nor could he mean any other, than that ſhe ſometimes painted with a pencil, and ſometimes carved in ivory.

I am therefore inclined to think, that when Pliny mentions *cera* in the ſingular number, altho’ he ſays *pingere*, yet as the *ceſtrum* is mentioned with it, it muſt be underſtood to mean carving or modelling; but that when it is in the plural, as in the following cited paſſage, and of burning the picture, he muſt mean the true encauſtic or enamel painting, and the *ceris* muſt mean a compoſition, which was capable of enduring the fire; for which, perhaps, the following ſhort reaſons may have ſome weight.

It appears in the 2d chapter of his 35th book, where Pliny is ſpeaking of the *Honos imaginum*, that modelling was greatly practiſed, eſpecially the buſts of great men, and of very ancient ſtanding. Theſe were made during the lives of the perſons, and laid up in their armories, or other repositories, till their deaths, in order to be carried before the deceased in their funeral rites, and expoſed to the public, while an oration was made by the neareſt of kin, who pointed to the image, as he proceeded, in his Elo-  
 gium upon the virtues of the perſon repreſented: and  
 this

this image was modelled in wax, as our wax-work is made to this day, and painted in natural colours, in order to come the nearer to nature. Pliny's words are very clear in this; "*expressi cera voltus singulis*" "*disponebantur armariis, ut essent imagines, quæ co-*" "*mitterentur gentilitia funera, &c.*" And it is also evident, that in order to take the true resemblance of the persons, whose busts they intended to make for these purposes, they took off a plaister mask from the face, and by way of mould, cast melted wax into it; whereby they obtained every feature, and afterwards made it perfect by repairing with proper tools. This is fully declared in his 12th chapter of the same book, which treats of plastics: wherein after he has mentioned Dibutades a potter of Sicyon to be the first inventor of forming the likeness of things in clay or plaster, and of first making images upon the corners of his tiles, he gives the invention of taking off masks from the face, for making busts, to Lisistratus, of the same town, brother of Lyfippus, in these words:—

" *Hominis autem imaginem gypso e facie ipsa*" "*primus omnium, expressit, ceraque in eam for-*" "*mam gypsi infusa, emendare instituit Lisistratus*" "*Sicyonius, frater Lyfippi; hic et similitudinem*" "*reddere instituit.—crevitque res in tantum, ut nulla*" "*signa statuæve sine argilla fierent; quo adparet*" "*antiquiorem hanc fuisse scientiam, quam fundendi*" "*æris.*" In a word, they appear, in the sequel of this chapter, to have imitated fruits, fishes, and everything else, by making clay moulds, and casting the wax or other matter into them. It is, by the way, remarkable, that in all these cases of casting or modelling *cera* is in the singular number, and must be taken

taken in its literal sense, as being a matter very capable of such a manufacture.

Now on the other hand, when that word is in the plural, there is some reason to conjecture, that a certain composition is meant, capable, as I have said before, of bearing the fire, or when it is laid upon ships with a brush; for we can neither suppose, that wax was ever capable simply to bear being burnt, as the *encausticæ picturæ* expresses and denotes it; nor that the *ceris igni resolutis* was to be simply laid on their ships without paint, rosin, turpentine, or some other matters, both to render it ductile and fluid enough not to clog the brush as it cooled, which every one must allow wax would infallibly do; and also to give it such a body, as that, when dry, it might stand the injuries of the weather; for the heat of the sun would melt simple wax, and make it run down in streams, without an admixture of something else to give it the necessary firmness.

The following I believe to be the words, which the Count de Caylus and the French painters have endeavoured to follow. Plin. lib. xxxv. chap. xi.

“ *Ceris pingere ac picturam inurere quis primus*  
 “ *excogitaverit, non constat: quidam Aristidis in-*  
 “ *ventum putant, postea consummatum a Praxitile;*  
 “ *sed aliquanto vetustiores encaustæ picturæ exti-*  
 “ *tere, &c.*”

Here again is the *ceris* in the plural, where he talks of burning in the picture, and where in the same sentence he calls it *encaustæ picturæ*. I would, therefore, humbly ask, whether wax painting, strictly speaking, would ever bear burning in; or whether,

according to the count's manner, a gentle colliquation by a gradual slow approach of the picture to the fire, and as slow a removal of it back again, can be called *encaustic painting*?

I might add much more to my purpose, by entering into the nature of varnishes, pottery, glass-making, and furnaces of the antients; which would throw more light upon the subject, and shew, that they were well acquainted with what colours would bear the fire, as well as with such as would not; for Pliny's chapter upon the different pigments must have been collected from antient authors as well as from his contemporaries, and contains a catalogue of those used by the painters, which consists of a very great number of articles.

That the antients were well acquainted with enamel painting cannot be doubted, since there are great numbers of their enamel pieces in the cabinets of the curious in many places. There is one, which is a Roman cup curiously enamelled upon brass, found at Froxfield, in the possession of Lord Hertford: there is a Roman enamelled platter upon the same metal, probably belong to the cup, with figures and inscriptions curiously painted in the enamel, of Leg. ii. Aug. and Leg. xx.v.v. in Britain, a drawing of which Dr. Stukely made in its colours. (See Buonroti's *Offervazzioni* on the Duke of Tuscany's Medallions.) And the Doctor has now an enamelled fibula of the same kind of workmanship; nor are there wanting cups with portraits of some friends enamelled at the bottoms, which were used *inter pocula*, to drink to their memories; and I cannot but think it probable,



probable, that the enamelled ware of cups, platters, ewers, and such like, which the great Raphael was concerned in making, many of which are now in England, were made in imitation of the antients; since in every other part of his art, he was so close a follower of their most correct works, and since the colours and appearance are exactly the same in his, that are upon those antient pieces mentioned. All I have further to say is, that if there be any-thing amiss in these conjectures, I freely submit to the judgment and correction of any better judge.

---

CII. *An Account of the late Earthquakes felt at Maestricht, in a Letter from Monsf. Vernede, Pastor of the Wallon Church there, to Monsf. Allemand, Professor of Philosophy at Leyden, F. R. S. Communicated by Mr. Abraham Trembley, F. R. S. Translated from the French.*

Maestricht, May 1, 1756.

Read May 27, 1756. **T**HE following are the observations, which I have been able to communicate to you, relating to the earthquakes, which we have felt here.

The number of the shocks has been very considerable. From the 18th of February to the beginning of April no day passed, in which one was not